



The Extra ½ %

FIREFIGHTER & LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER SPECIAL RETIREMENT IN THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

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FF/LEO Retirement Newsletter

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Update on the Backlog of Individual Claims

Since January 1, 1998, FLERT has completed review on approximately 2,797 claims. Currently, there are 261 claims pending review. Eventually, there should be very few, if any, individual claims filed, and these will primarily be by new employees. It is very important for all bureaus to use the existing standard covered positions so that employees who warrant coverage are properly placed in a covered PD.

Upcoming FF/LEO Retirement Training Sessions

FLERT is continuing to host FF/LEO retirement training sessions. The training is designed specifically for human resources offices and fire and law enforcement managers. The purpose of the training sessions is to familiarize or re-familiarize HR Specialists, Supervisors, and Managers of the rules under the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) as they pertain to firefighters and law enforcement officers. The individual claim review process will be complete in less than two years. It will then be incumbent upon the bureaus to track employees' coverage and counsel them on special retirement issues.

Upcoming training sessions are planned for:

- Washington, D.C. – April 12-13, 2006
- Atlanta – April 20, 2006
- Boston – May 17, 2006
- Yellowstone – June 21, 2006
- Anchorage – July 12, 2006

For information on a training session, or if you would like to enroll, please email Patti Rahn at Patti_Rahn@ios.doi.gov or Jo-Ann Jones at Jo-Ann_Jones@ios.doi.gov. Additional information for each training session will be available closer to the actual training dates.

Online information is also available at <http://www.doi.gov/training/flert> and <http://flert.nifc.gov>.

New Beginnings – The Claim Review Process Nearly Over

By Richard Costello, HR Specialist

Since 1998, the Firefighter and Law Enforcement Retirement Team (FLERT) has received quite a few questions asking, “how many claims are left for review?” As of March 31, 2006, we have approximately 261 pending claims. What does this mean, and what is going to happen with FLERT? Internally, we will be working on the several projects which will get our files and data base in better shape.

That is, we will be:

- 1) Scanning and shipping claims that have been completed for at least 5 years to the National Archive Records Administration (NARA). Once claims have been completed and shipped to NARA, we are asking NARA to hold these files for approximately fifty years. Our disposition schedule is pending NARA approval. To date no files have been shipped to NARA;
- 2) Scanning and digitizing all position descriptions, thus reducing our filing space. Currently we have about 9, Times 2 filing cabinets which contain all Bureau position descriptions. These files are completely full. The position description number, dates of classification, title, grade, series, date of approval, type of approval, etc... has been recorded in our database; however, we are hoping to be able to digitize these files for easy storage and retrieval. Currently if a customer





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requests a copy of a PD we have to manually find it, copy it, and mail or fax it to the customer. Our goal is to streamline and improve this process;

- 3) Provide nationwide training sessions on FERS special retirement. We have already started this project. Our goal is to train as many HR Specialists, managers, and supervisors so they can be better equipped to answer questions and counsel their employees on FERS rules and/or issues;
- 4) Update FLERS database with proper coding for statistical purposes. In July 2003, we had FWS in Denver modify our database to allow us to provide more detailed information on decisions made to the Bureau's. However, the data is only as good as our previous data base. When we completed a claim in our old data base it was marked as archived or done. This presented a problem in the current system when we try to track the number of claims that were approved or denied. We are manually going through each claim and verifying the status of the claim (i.e. approved, denied, pending, etc.) to make sure our database is more accurate; and
- 5) Create and provide a training program for FERS FF/LEOs that provides information on "the FERS Retirement System -- From Beginning to End." This training will take a proactive approach to pre-retirement.

This is just a short list of projects of which FLERT will be working. Nonetheless, the need for a claim review process will slowly diminish. That is, the amount of incoming claims should be minimal if Bureaus are properly using the DOI standard position descriptions (PD's).

Just so there is no confusion, FLERT (or whatever title the Team receives) will retain a staff that will be devoted specifically to Questions and Answers as well as training for the special retirement program. Additionally, the Department is working on other projects that can be assigned to the team.

FERS for Firefighters and Law Enforcement Officers – Beginning to End

FLERT will be offering another retirement training course in the coming months. This training will be an orientation to the Federal Employees Retirement System, with emphasis on the special retirement for firefighters and law enforcement officers. The course is designed for an audience consisting of firefighter and law enforcement officer *employees*. The training provides guidance to employees regarding special retirement coverage and the rules for eligibility. Employees will learn how to calculate their annuities under the enhanced retirement system. Finally, guidance and information will be provided for other retirement planning topics such as Medicare, Health Benefits, Social Security, and the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP).

The first training session is planned for Anchorage on July 13, 2006. A short session of this training will also be presented at the Human Resources Conference September 11–15, 2006, in Houston. For information on this training session, or if you would like to enroll, please email Toni Orth at Toni_Orth@ios.doi.gov.

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